

COLLABORATION KICKSTARTER

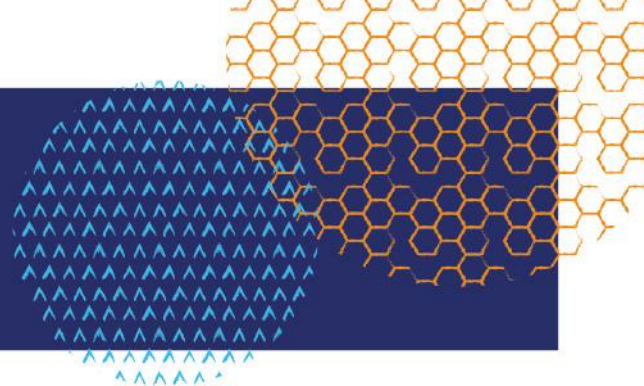
Application Guide

The Collaboration Kickstarter aims to support Imperial researchers and our local communities to deliver research collaboratively. In the following, we outline the principles, aims, and process for the 2026 fund, where we will award funds of up to £10,000 to a small portfolio of projects that demonstrate a participatory approach to their research.

In this spirit, the Collaboration Kickstarter itself has been co-produced by Imperial researchers, engagement practitioners, and community members with experience of engaging with Imperial research. Each year, the fund will be co-evaluated with staff and community members to ensure we are always learning, reflecting, and doing our best to make our fund as innovative and accessible as possible.

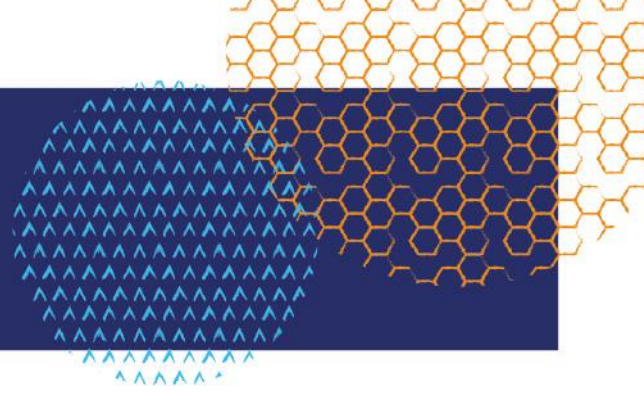
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What are participatory research approaches?

Participatory research involves academic researchers and non-academic publics collaboratively producing new knowledge by designing and delivering research projects together.

Generally, these collaborations take place between people with academic expertise and people with lived experience in the area being researched. As collaborators, both groups work as equals to decide which questions get asked, how they get answered, and what happens with the knowledge created. We often use the term participatory approaches to refer to an entire spectrum of practices, from single co-design interventions to fully co-produced participatory research projects.

The Collaboration Kickstarter seeks to support research approaches that partner with local communities to share decision-making power in all aspects of their work together. It may only be able to support a few small elements of research, but it is the collaborative designing and delivering of these elements that is important to this fund.

Principles of the fund

- 1 Participatory research approaches are about discovery and learning. The journey itself is part of the destination, and the legacy of the work is important.
- 2 We are wary of top-down relationships and language. Our focus is on equity and mutuality, and we value different kinds of knowledge equally.
- 3 We will support activities that otherwise would not be funded and, as part of which, communities have a sense that they are having an impact on the research.
- 4 We will be ambitious, even within the limitations of funding and institutional/systemic constraints. But we do not expect anyone to work for free or over their capacity.
- 5 Our Kickstarter fund is small, so developing people's skills and building new relationships is a priority.
- 6 We will make our fund and the research it supports as accessible as possible, not relying on specific kinds of knowledge, language, or training to be included.
- 7 What we learn from our Kickstarter projects should be shareable and transferable. Our learning will become a community asset. Something that can enable others to implement their own work and continue the learning process.

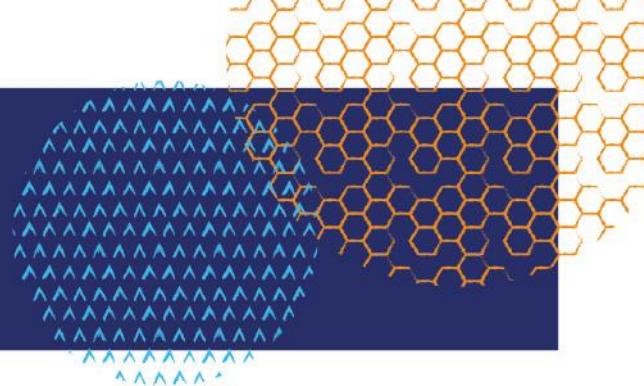
Aims of the fund

The fund aims to support participatory approaches to research in which communities can impact decision making. **There are two key aims for the 2026 fund:**

- 1 Develop a broader culture of participatory approaches to research at Imperial College London by funding research activity that demonstrates partnership and collaboration between community partners and academic researchers.
- 2 Build equitable and transparent research partnerships as a route to creating impact which benefits communities, research, and society at large.

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To achieve this, we aim to:

- Support different approaches to ensuring that research questions can be identified by the community, reflect lived experiences and hold a potential to have a positive impact on people's lives as a result.
- Support approaches that explore how to equitably build trust and transparency by ethically sharing decision making power and access to data, finances and resources.

Timeline

November 2025

3rd of November:

The fund will launch and will be open to applications from Imperial researchers and community partners.

5th of November:

Online information event about the fund. Open to researchers and community members.

12th of November:

A Community Connection and Collaboration event will be held as part of the work designed to support the development of new partnerships.

December 2025

5th of December:

Applications close.

January 2026

22nd January:

Review of applications will take place by a panel consisting of two members of the public engagement team and two community partners.

Award letters will be sent out to successful Kickstarter projects and funds transferred following confirmation from relevant applicants.

February 2026

13th of May:

Quarterly meeting with successful Kickstarter projects. To share progress, challenges and learning, and strengthen working relationships.

July 2026

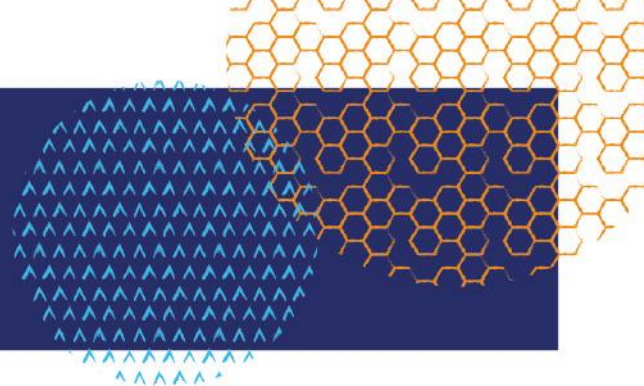
22nd of July:

Projects close.

Grant size

We aim for quality over quantity, preferring more resource and capacity to poorly funded projects. With this in mind, we will award funds of up to £10,000.

With a maximum of £40,000 available we will aim to fund between 4-8 projects.



What will we fund?

We will award funds of up to £10,000 to 4-8 projects with evidence of collaborative working throughout. Proposals should include both a named Imperial research lead and a named Northwest London community partner lead. You can [find out about the kinds of projects that were successful last year here](#).

This year we are particularly interested in applications that:

- Seek to build a new relationship between Imperial researchers and a particular community organisation.
- Seek to design and deliver community-led research, where topics and questions are generated by members of the community.
- Work with communities with lived experience of the research topic to collaboratively analyse research data that has already been collected.

What won't we fund?

Our seed fund exists to support participatory research approaches. Therefore, **applicants should demonstrate that any proposed activity is academic research**. We will not fund educational activity, public engagement with research, or evaluation.

For more information on these differences you can refer to this [guidance from the Health Research Authority](#).

Who can apply?

The 2026 fund is open to Imperial researchers (including PhD's) from any discipline and community organisations working in one or more Northwest London boroughs.

We hold a broad view of who can be a "community partner". In our pilot year, successful applicants included local branches of national charities, third sector organisations, grassroots community organisations, and newly created groups made up of individual experts by experience.

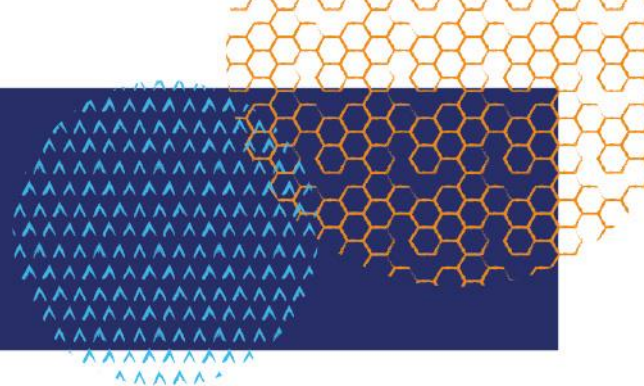
We ask that applicants make the case that your particular partnership is a community partnership, based in a Northwest London borough, and will deliver academic research activities in line with the aims and principles of the fund.

Selection Criteria

To support applications and for transparency, we share the following four questions that we will use as our assessment criteria and scoring framework when we decide whether to fund a Kickstarter project.

1 How well does it fit the principles and aims of our fund?

- Is this proposal submitted jointly by an Imperial College Researcher and a Community Partner?
- What are the project aims, who will they benefit and how?
- Does this project demonstrate mutual benefit?
- Does this project demonstrate collaboration beginning to end?



2 Is the project achievable within time and resource constraints?

- Does this project explain clearly how funds will be used?
- How much of the funding is going to community partners and do they have a say over how it is spent?
- Does this project properly value the time of community partners and/or actually fund the cost of delivery rather than relying on “in-kind” contributions?
- Is the timeline feasible?

3 Is it clear how the resources will be used to build trust?

- Does this project present a plan to manage and safeguard data?
- Will data be collected, accessed, and analysed by all partners on the project?

4 Will this project contribute learning and develop shared knowledge at Imperial and in our local communities about how to effectively collaborate on research?

- Are we avoiding duplication if we fund this project? Our focus is on quality. Less is more.
- Is it clear how this project or activity will help us learn about how to do participatory research together longer term?

Application support

If you are a community organisation working in a Northwest London borough and have an idea for a research topic you would be interested in exploring with an Imperial researcher you can [submit and expression of interest](#) and a member of our team will be in touch.

If you are an Imperial researcher with an idea for a Kickstarter project, we strongly encourage you to get in touch before submitting an application. You can [book a one-to-one advice session here](#).

If you are interested in applying but have not yet identified an Imperial researcher or community partner to work with, you can and should still get in touch. We can't always guarantee that we will be able to find suitable partners, but we will always do everything we can to support your work!

As we strongly encourage that applications are developed collaboratively by community partners and Imperial researchers, we have made 'Application Support Grants', of a few hundred pounds each, available to support this. Applications for the grants will be reviewed by the Public and Community Engagement team and available on a rolling basis until the funds are spent. These grants can be used to pay for community partner time, hire a space to work together, pay for travel and refreshments and so on. **If you are interested in applying for an Application Support Grant, please contact us at societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk**

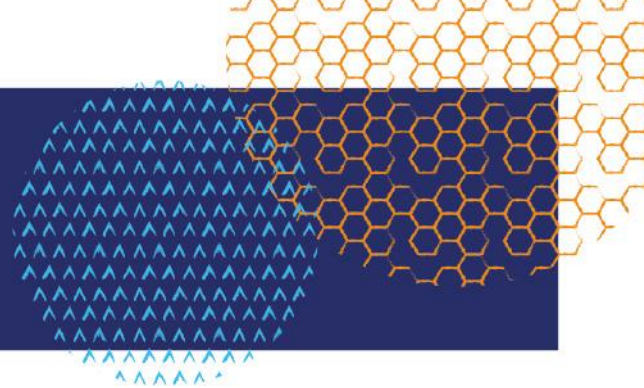
Submitting an application

Application forms should be submitted to societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk by **5pm on the 12th of December 2025**.

The proposal form asks applicants to demonstrate how the proposed activity meets the funding criteria. Crucially, we are looking for:

- **Evidence of collaborative working throughout**

You should demonstrate that the proposed activity is a partnership between Imperial researchers and community members in Northwest London. Explaining why the partnership is relevant, appropriate, and capable of conducting the



activities proposed. It should explain clearly how the proposal has been produced collaboratively and how you will continue to work collaboratively going forward.

- **Aiming for impact and legacy**

You should explain how your proposed activity will provide mutual benefit to researchers and community partners. This should include how awarding funds to the project will build towards further work together beyond the scope of Kickstarter funding as well as how it will contribute to broader learning around how to design and deliver participatory research effectively.

- **How data will be managed and shared (where applicable)**

Where you plan to collect research data, you should explain how it will be collected, accessed, and analysed collaboratively by all partners on the project.

If you will be collecting data, you should explain clearly that you are only collecting necessary data, how you will safeguard and store data, and what data will be used for in the short, medium, and long term. In cases where data is being collected, it will also be necessary to gain research ethics approval, and this should factor this into your project timelines. The Public and Community Engagement team can advise on this process.

- **A breakdown of how funds will be used**

You will be asked to explain how funds will be spent, including explaining how you have costed for community partners' time and contributions and how decision making around spending has been shared by all partners.

How we decide who gets funding

Proposals will be reviewed by a panel that includes:

- Two members of the Public and Community Engagement team
- An Imperial participatory researcher
- Two community peer reviewers.

We will take a 'portfolio approach' to awarding funding. This means that rather than deciding to fund only those projects that score most highly against our selection criteria, we will try to fund a diverse set of projects. Diversity of projects, here, will refer to:

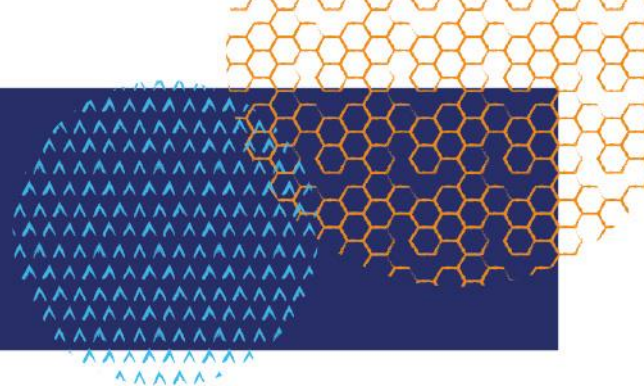
- Research topic/theme/area.
- Where on the research cycle activity is taking place.
- Type of community partner (e.g., charity, local authority, community organisation).
- Career stage (early career vs senior academic etc.).
- Demographic considerations (which communities does the project engage with)
- Geographical location of project work.
- Size of funds requested (medium pots vs large pots etc.)

What the portfolio will look like, however, will emerge based on the proposals we receive. This means that rather than targeting specific research areas, types of community organisation (etc.) we will see what kinds of proposals we receive and try to avoid funding similar kinds of projects.

A portfolio approach will mean that review will take place over two stages:

Stage 1:

Reviewers score proposals against our selection criteria to assess how well each project aligns with the aims and principles of our fund.



Stage 2:

Reviewers then consider those projects that are highest scoring and awarding funds with a view to building a diverse portfolio of projects. The aim here is to not duplicate work and to fund a broad range of research areas, community partners, geographic locations etc. based on the applications we have.

Unsuccessful proposals will receive feedback from the review panel about why their projects were not awarded funding with a view to sharing learning and building capacity to apply for funding elsewhere or in the future.

In some cases, the panel may decide to award smaller funds to applications with potential to support the development of ideas.

Who are the funds awarded to?

Unless otherwise stated in proposals, funds will be awarded to the Imperial researchers named on applications. Community partners may then be paid as external facilitators, consultants, participants etc. as appropriate. Though decision making around project spending should be shared between all partners.

The Public and Community Engagement team can support with payment processes.

We also recognise that not all community partners will be in a position to accept monetary payment as this can, for example, have implications for people in receipt of benefits or have tax implications. In these cases, we are open to exploring alternative means of acknowledging people for their time and skills.

In some instances, and where stated in proposals, community partners may be awarded funds directly. Please bear in mind that organisations without a written constitution and bank account will not be able to receive funds directly.

Get in touch

If you have any other questions about the Collaboration Kickstarter, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us at societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk